2005

Meeting the accountability challenge in guided reading instruction

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This project by: Rachelle Jensen

Titled: Meeting the Accountability Challenge in Guided Reading Instruction

Has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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Meeting the Accountability Challenge in Guided Reading Instruction

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By
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April 2005

Abstract

The demands for accountability and mandated consequences require a balanced and thoughtful approach to literacy instruction. The purpose of this study was to investigate the opinions of teachers regarding the use of guided reading and how it benefits the need to meet the accountability challenge. Seven teachers were chosen to take part in this interviewing process. All of the participants' responses focused on a global theme of accountability. Teachers explained that they were more accountable for their students' instruction through three key factors: accountability through guided reading, accountability through conversations with colleagues, and time based accountability.

With changing government-enforced standards in recent years, schools are frantic with attempts to find solutions to poor student test scores from standardized reading tests. The revision of the Elementary and Secondary Act in 2000 and the implementation of the No Child Left Behind legislation, which mandates the testing of all children from grade 3 to 8 every year, holds schools accountable for the test performance of their students. Scores from state tests are driving the search for programs and teaching approaches that help students learn while helping schools meet state accountability standards.

A study was recently conducted to discover what instructional practices would help students raise their reading scores on standardized tests. Just as they expected, and their data supported, one-size instruction will not fit all children (Valencia & Buly, 2004). The results clearly indicated that the children tested had individual differences, which would require individualized instruction. Instructional approaches that did not include all the facets of the reading process would not be beneficial to students who do poorly on standardized tests (Valencia & Buly, 2004). These researchers and many more caution against over-generalizing student needs or relying on a single measurement to make important instructional decisions (Hiebert &Taylor, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Raphael & Au, 1998; Valencia & Buly, 2004).

Many point to evidence that there is a need for flexible, small-group instruction (Hiebert &Taylor, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Raphael & Au, 1998). Small-group or one-to-one reading instruction is a critical literacy component for struggling learners (Valencia & Buly, 2004; Vellutino & Scanlon, 1999). Small group instruction allows children to develop as individual readers while giving teachers the opportunity to observe individual readers process text (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

There has been a wide range of research published regarding remediation and interventions in reading (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2000; Hiebert &Taylor, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Raphael & Au, 1998). It has been proven that the most successful literacy programs researched contained similar instructional strategies and characteristics (Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Hiebert &Taylor, 2000; Raphael & Au, 1998). These characteristics included a small-group instruction component that benefited or supplemented whole group instruction, comprehension activities and writing (Clay, 1993; Hiebert & Taylor, 2000).

Guided reading is the most effective way to conduct small group instruction that is focusing on reading. (Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003). Guided reading occurs in a small-group context because the small group allows for interactions among readers that benefit them all.

"Guided reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual students learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging text with understanding and fluency." (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 193).

Most research suggests that reading failure is preventable for all but a small percentage of children (e.g. Clay, 1993; Cunningham, 2000; Hiebert & Taylor, 2000; Pikulski, 1994). These findings are especially important since there is little research that suggests that remediation after second grade or programs in higher grades designed to correct reading problems were successful (Hiebert &Taylor, 2000; Raphael & Au, 1998; Stahl, 2004).

It is no longer enough to teach first and second graders to read fluently and decode unknown text automatically, with the hopes that comprehension skills will be taught in the intermediate grades. Comprehension strategies are important to enable the early reader to understand and recall more of what they have read (Fountas &Pinnell, 2001; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Palinscar & Brown, 1984). The key to children's acquisition of comprehension strategies is the

instructional techniques used by teachers. Teachers must teach children what the strategy is, and instruct how to use the strategy, and when the strategy will be most useful (Palinscar & Brown, 1986). Effective strategy instruction also uses a gradual release of responsibility; instruction should begin with explicit teaching, move to guided practice, and then over time the responsibility to put strategies into practice is moved to the students (Palinscar & Brown, 1986; Stahl, 2004). The best format to instruct comprehension activities is in the small group setting (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996; Ganske et al., 2003).

In his well-known article, Stanovich (1986) proposes that negative reading experiences among children with lesser ability create a downward spiral of failure that affects the subsequent development of reading skills and habits. Children who encounter problems while learning to read, read less, and without practice they fall behind in reading skill development. Stanovich refers to this phenomenon as the "Matthew effect."

Some contributing factors to the "Matthew effect" in literacy achievement may be traditional whole class literacy instruction and small group instruction that is not varied and flexible (Leppanen, 2004; Stanovich, 1986). Whole class instruction, while a valuable and necessary part of literacy education, tends to marginalize those students who need more interaction and closer contact with the teacher and a text they can read successfully (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988). In traditional small-group settings, reading instruction groups were firmly established and it was practically impossible to alter the composition of the reading groups. This inflexibility did not allow for change over time or developmental differences; therefore once a child was in a low group they were always in a low group (Hiebert, 1983). This suggests that special attention should be given to those who are doing poorly, as they continuously fall behind the better readers (Stanovich, 1986).

Guided reading with dynamic grouping, avoids the traditional problems of grouping because the teacher changes the composition of the groups regularly to accommodate the different learning paths of readers. This supplements the whole class instruction, so that the lowest students still benefit from the instruction (Cunningham et al., 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001).

Russian psychologist Vygotsky introduced the term "zone of proximal development" (see Mind in Society, 1978) to educators to describe the experience of a learner who works successfully with the support of another and extends his knowledge in the process. You are teaching in Vygotsky's zone, often referred to as the learning zone (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), when you carefully select reading material for your students that is in their instructional range, and then allow them to be challenged in the reading process while instructing them with scaffolded support when it is needed (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

Guided reading makes it possible to teach at the cutting edge of students' understanding because your teaching helps students read more productively and more intensively. "The purpose of guided reading is to meet the varying instructional needs of all the students in your class, enabling them to greatly expand their reading powers." (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001, p. 191)

Varied and flexible small-group instruction allows students to support one another as readers and to feel part of a community of readers. Vygotsky (1978) also stressed the social nature of learning. Social interaction plays an important role in guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Context for Study

Demands for accountability in classrooms are increasing; in many places around the world the achievement gap between the haves and have-nots in reading is widening (Ruetzel and Mitchell, 2003). The demands for accountability and mandated consequences require a balanced

and thoughtful approach to literacy instruction. With the national goal of all children reading by the time they are in third grade, every teacher is focused on using the most effective, researched-based instructional practices. As a reading teacher, I too want the most effective and successful practices in reading education to be utilized at my school.

For this reason, I decided to do a study of my own involving the teachers I work with at Apple Orchard Elementary School (a pseudonym). The purpose of this study was to investigate the reading program that is in place at Apple Orchard. I wanted to investigate the opinions of the teachers I work with regarding the use of guided reading in our school. In doing so, I wanted to determine if there was a need for change or additions to our current program. The purpose for the following interviews was to elicit teacher beliefs and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of what we call our 'book club' program.

When I joined Apple Orchard as a part-time classroom teacher, the reading teachers were in the process of designing a guided reading program for first and second grade students. This program is now known as 'book clubs'. In book clubs all students in one class have guided reading at the same time. This was made possible by having two reading teachers, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, and the classroom teacher each take a group of five or six students. In this way, all students were receiving small group instruction at the same time. This allowed the remainder of the language arts time to be spent on the whole group literacy curriculum that is required to be used in our district. The students received 30 minutes of guided reading, three times a week. The key element of the book club program was the flexible and dynamic grouping that is designed to have all students reading at their instructional level at all times. Thoughtful and dynamic grouping that allows for maximum effectiveness, efficiency and social learning is a cornerstone of guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

The reading teachers at that time generated the initial ideas for the book club program based on recommendation of guided reading creators, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (see Guided Reading: Good First Teachings for all Children, 1996). They felt that children would benefit from receiving guided reading regularly while avoiding time spent at centers. The most successful classrooms are those that had children spending more time reading and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001; Taylor et al., 1999).

Method

Apple Orchard School is located in an upper middle class neighborhood in the Midwest. This building is one of three in the district that qualifies for Title I services. It is the only building in the district that houses the ESL students and it also serves the families that live in student housing at the state university located in town. Out of the six elementary buildings in the district, Apple Orchard houses just over 50% of the students who are open enrolled to the district.

Seven individuals were chosen that could provide varied input in this interviewing process. Four of the interviewees selected are first or second grade classroom teachers; a reading teacher, a former reading teacher and an ESL teacher were also interviewed. Kerry, Leigh, Mona and Therese (not their real names) were the classroom teachers that participated in this study. These teachers have a wide range of backgrounds and teaching experience. From a first year teacher to a veteran with over twenty years in the school district, this group brings together many experiences, and a variety of teaching styles and philosophies.

The reading teachers and ESL teacher that took part in this study range in experience and job descriptions as well. The current reading teacher and former reading teacher are the original designers of the book club program. Erin (not her real name) has always been a reading teacher

in this school district and another district in this state. Sally (not her real name) left Apple Orchard School to teach kindergarten in another building in the district. Both teachers are reading recovery trained. Karen (not her real name) has been the district's elementary ESL teacher for more than 10 years. All three of these teachers will be referred to in this study as specialists.

Sally's interview took place in a private area of a restaurant while the rest of the interviews took place at Apple Orchard School. All interviews took place in a private setting and were conducted one at a time during the month of May 2004. Each interviewee was asked one question at a time. The questions were unstructured and open-ended to allow discussion to generate. The reading teachers and ESL teacher received different interview questions than the classroom teachers. This was done so that the questions could be specific to the interviewees' job description and responsibilities within the book club program. (See Appendix A and B)

Participants were asked about the book club program, how it benefited their teaching and how the program could be improved upon in order to continually serve students more effectively. Discussions focused on the book club program's ability to allow teachers to be more knowledgeable and accountable in their students' literacy instruction.

The interviews were audio-taped and then coded and transcribed to ensure privacy to the participants. Audio taping and transcribing the interviews also ensured that the information gathered was an accurate portrayal of the participants view points and opinions. Transcripts were analyzed by marking key phrases; then those key phrases were collapsed into key words. Then patterns and trends were established by noting key words that were repeated across several sets of transcripts. Key words and sentences were determined to be critical to the teachers interviewed if they were repeated by a majority of the participants.

Findings

Throughout the interviews all of the participants' responses focused on a global theme of accountability. Because accountability issues most often revolve around obtaining specific information about student learning, all the teachers discussed the information they gathered about their students' literacy abilities through the book club process. They continuously commented on how this information made them feel more accountable.

The teachers repeatedly expressed that they were more accountable for their students' instruction because they were able to better meet the needs of their students through the flexible grouping of the book club program. Students were reading at their instructional level while teachers addressed specific skills that a particular group required. Teachers were better able to teach to the varied learning styles of their students because they knew more about their students' individual needs.

The interviewees felt that another beneficial component of the book club program was the accountability achieved through conversations with each other during the book club program. Because teachers were expected to share specific information about individual students, they felt more knowledgeable and accountable.

The teachers often expressed that time was an important key to the book club program. They felt that they needed to be accountable for the time spent on each part of their literacy instruction.

Individualized instruction leads to accountability:

All four classroom teachers noted that from the beginning to the end of the school year, all of their students had achieved remarkable literacy growth. They all cited the results of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) as evidence of this growth. The teachers gave many examples of how the book club program contributed to the growth they saw in their students.

The participants attributed the small groups, which allows for individualize instruction, as a key factor to the book club's success. It was noted that all the interviewees expressed beliefs that because their students were reading at their instructional level when they were in the book clubs, the growth they made was much more evident than without the book clubs:

"I see the book club program as a way to be able to approach each child as an individual learner with individual needs. Through book clubs, teachers are able to learn more about each child's learning styles and the strategies they are using when they read. This helps the classroom teachers to better instruct each child, which is why literacy growth is achieved at a grander scale with the book club program." (Kerry, 1st grade classroom teacher)

All of the teachers interviewed appreciated the flexible grouping of book clubs. Grade level teachers meet bi-weekly to discuss student data with the specialists. These formal meetings were in addition to all the other times when teachers met and discussed students informally. During these meetings teachers presented data that was gathered and made decision on how to adjust the groupings using that data.

When Sally worked at Apple Orchard she felt very strongly about flexible grouping:

"I could group my students first according to their instructional level, and then as I worked with them if I noticed particular students needed to work on a specific skill, I could switch my groups. Even though all of the students in my group were sometimes not at the same instructional level, they all needed to work on a specific skill. I felt that because I was so knowledgeable of my students' needs, I could justify my instructional decisions if I was faced with accountability issues."

Mona (2nd grade classroom teacher) concluded that guided reading instruction used in the book club program [positively] affected who students were as readers:

"We know through research that guided reading is definitely something that makes a difference in kids. When I compare where these kids are now to the kids that didn't have book clubs, these kids are making much better progress throughout the year and just are better readers. And more than just better readers, they're better comprehenders."

The specialists saw the book clubs as a way to see their students in a different setting. They could work with their students along with a lot of the other students. Erin (reading teacher 1st and 2nd grade) stated, "Book clubs are essential to my instruction because one of our goals in Reading Recovery is to see that our students can take the skills we teach them one-on-one and incorporate those skills into the whole classroom and small groups settings."

When Karen (ESL teacher K-6) worked in book clubs her groups were typically a mixture of ESL and regular education students:

"I feel that book clubs give my ESL students an opportunity to participate in a mainstream context. I can address my ESL students' particular needs in such a way that it helps all of the students in my groups and might add a little bit of insight for some of the non-ESL students as well."

The specialists all commented on their ability to continually monitor and figure out what strategies their students were using and what skills they still needed. They were able to work with a lot more students than they would have in a traditional reading program. They were also better able to recognize when a student was falling behind his or her classmates. They observed that in a traditional specialist setting, they might have had to wait until they tested their students to find out what their instructional needs were.

Several teachers interviewed compared the information gathered through the book club program to having on-going assessments with each of their students. They suspected that this

information was necessary to know where to focus their instruction next; it helped them make decisions about how to individualize and scaffold all their literacy instruction.

Therese (2nd grade classroom teacher) explained,

"I could get a lot of the same information by doing running records with each student. But, it would be way too time consuming, and it wouldn't be nearly as efficient. When you take running records you are not instructing. That is why I feel that book clubs are the most beneficial way to gather information about my students' literacy growth and abilities."

Accountability through conversations:

All of the participants believed that opportunities to communicate with their colleagues made them more accountable. Anytime they were asked about their students, they had to be able to talk about where their students were at, their abilities and what strategies they were using. Not only did these teachers feel accountable when communicating to each other in the book club program, they felt especially accountable when they talked about their students and the book club program with administrators and parents.

Therese (2nd grade classroom teacher) said,

"It really allows me to focus on a few students and get to know them really well, but at the same time it gives me current data from all of the teachers, letting me know exactly how the students are doing and where they are. I am assured from our conversations [between teachers involved in book club] that all students are getting personalized quality instruction they need in a small groups setting. Obviously, the more teachers you have involved, the more individualized instruction you're going to be able to give."

All of the participants felt that they learned a lot about how their students process text when they were working within the book club model. During these collegial conversations they learned

about students' fluency, decoding, and comprehension skills, in addition to how well they were self-correcting miscues. Within the book club format teachers often discussed what reading level their students were at, what strategies they were using or not using when they are reading, as well as if there were certain areas of concern they had for a particular student.

They maintained that talking with each other about book clubs helped to pinpoint specific areas or strengths and weaknesses in their students. Karen (ESL teacher K-6th grade) knew that, because of the book club program, at any given time she could tell you exactly where her students were. "The nature of the book club program, where we have so much communication between the Title 1 teachers and the classroom teachers, helps us all to be on the same page with each student."

"Through conversations with the other book club teachers, I feel reassured about what I am seeing and what they are seeing. Usually what we are seeing with students matches but, sometimes I am noticing something that they are not and they are noticing something that I am not, so it also makes all of us a little bit more aware about where each kid is and where instruction should be focused next. Because we are talking and comparing observations of individual students, it makes all of us more knowledgeable and accountable." (Leigh, 1st grade classroom teacher)

Mona (2nd grade classroom teacher) knows that accountability is a big part of book clubs:

"When you look at how accountable we have to be now, we have to have the information just for our own accountability and also, so that we know how to instruct the children that we're working with. I have to be more accountable because we are all communicating with each other; we have to have that accountability with each other. Without that communication the instruction wouldn't be effective. I wouldn't know what type of instruction my students were receiving. I

wouldn't know what books they had read or what strategies they'd been instructed in. I wouldn't know what needs each child had."

As a reading teacher, Sally (former reading teacher) felt very accountable when the book club program was in place. She felt that the opportunity to get more information about each student through discussions with other teachers was very beneficial. She liked to be able to express her concerns about particular students to the classroom teacher and then work together to find the best instructional practices for those students.

Time as an accountability issue:

Most of the interviewees had conflicting views about the time benefit of book clubs. The teachers felt that the instructional time saved during the book club program was beneficial. They explained that because the book club process cut back on the time needed to conduct guided reading, they could use so much more of their time in the classroom to do additional instructional practices.

Leigh and Mona (1st and 2nd grade classroom teachers, respectively) remembered previous years when they were not doing book clubs; it was a lot harder for them to manage guided reading when they were teaching by themselves, and they felt that the results were not nearly as great.

The specialists also realized that the biggest need the classroom teachers had was time. They felt that when kids were doing literacy centers, they could be engaged in good literacy practice activities, but that was not nearly as beneficial as being instructed by a teacher.

However, many expressed concerns that the book club program was "supplanting and not supplementing" (Junge & Krvaric, 2004; pg. 9) the instruction offered by the classroom teacher. They saw a need for the classroom teachers to do guided reading with all of their students, so

that she has more first-hand knowledge of students' reading progress. They also felt that it was important for the specialists to provide services and support to the lowest students, in addition to what all students were receiving in the regular classroom.

It was generally felt that doing guided reading three times a week was not enough. A few teachers felt that it was time to have the book clubs as an additional instructional practice that supplements the classroom guided reading. All of the participants acknowledged that the book club program was a good first step in learning how to conduct guided reading lessons and use the information that you gather in the guided reading process.

Sally (former reading teacher) admitted that if she were a classroom teacher, she would have wanted to work with each of her students in guided reading:

"If I was a classroom teacher, and I wasn't doing guided reading with all of my students, I would have had to figure out how to work with them during silent reading or some other time. I would want to make sure I am touching base with each student systematically."

Kerry (1st grade classroom teacher) and Sally (former reading teacher) both pointed out that if book clubs were done in addition to the classroom guided reading, the lowest students would be seen by the classroom teacher and during the book clubs. These students would not have to be self-monitored during a center time. Also, by doing more guided reading in the classroom, more time could be spent during book clubs doing guided writing.

Implications for our School

Teachers, schools, and districts are to be held accountable for knowing the literacy strengths and needs of all their students. They are expected to have an in-depth understanding of each child's progress. Apple Orchard's book club program helped teachers to be more knowledgeable and therefore more accountable to their students' literacy growth. Rather than conducting further

time-consuming tests, book club teachers were able to continuously gather intimate knowledge of each student's literacy growth in this small group setting through observations and informal assessments. The evaluation of the information gathered was on-going and it was communicated among the book club teachers and administration on a regular basis.

Although some responses regarding the benefits of the book club program were expected, the overwhelmingly positive viewpoints that were shared were surprising. It was apparent that each of the educators interviewed truly had the child's best interest at heart. They believed that they were providing the best instruction possible through the book club program.

Apple Orchard's book clubs appeared to have many benefits to the students as well as the teachers. The most talked about benefits were the ability to communicate concerns and information about individual students and the ability to individualize instruction. All seven teachers valued the communication that took place in the book club format and felt that it allowed for accountability that would not be achieved in other instructional settings. It was agreed upon by all that this aspect of the book club program must continue.

The book club allowed for the teachers involved to get to know specific reading habits of many students. This information was a crucial aspect of the communication that took place between teachers. The communication was used to help the classroom teachers better plan future instruction that specifically met the needs of their students.

Because the book clubs were changed and rearranged on a frequent basis, the flexible grouping enabled students to always be reading at their instructional level during their guided reading session and it allowed for adjustments in grouping students when some students were advancing faster than others. The majority of the responses given by all seven participants

focused on how the 'book club' program not only contributed to the growth in their students' literacy achievement, but it was a major factor in that growth.

It seemed that the participants appreciated the fact that all students were receiving small group instruction at the same time. However, most acknowledged that this was not enough small-group reading instruction for the lowest students.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Based on the information gathered in this study, I feel that Apple Orchard should continue the guided reading program that is already in place. However, it seems that it will be necessary to extend the existing program to include time for classroom teachers to meet with all students. According to the interviews, most participants felt that it would be possible to extend the program while maintaining its integrity and beneficial qualities. Some participants even volunteered ideas regarding new schedules and plans to incorporate an additional instructional piece.

I believe that the book club format was a necessary stepping-stone. Without the previous steps that were taken, teachers would not have the knowledge and the experiences necessary to continue expanding their guided reading program. I think that these teachers are experts at delving into information that presents itself during book club instruction. They have become extremely proficient at using that information to direct further instructional decisions.

I feel that it would be beneficial to my colleagues and myself to further study the results the book club program has had on student achievement. More research also needs to be conducted on effective ways to instruct in a guided reading setting and how guided reading programs can be expanded and improved. I would also like to see more research conducted on the accountability issue in regards to instructional practices. Research needs to be done to discover if teachers feel

more accountable and knowledgeable about their students when using certain instructional practices versus others.

The findings from my interviews confirm that a lot of thought has gone into the establishment of Apple Orchard's book club program. It is evident that all the teachers interviewed are pleased with the results this program has accomplished and are dedicated to seeing the program continue, grow and improve.

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Appendix A

Interview questions for first and second grade classroom teachers.

1. Is there growth in your students' literacy achievement? How do you know?

2. If there is growth in your students' literacy achievement, does the book club program contribute to that growth? Why or why not? If there isn't growth, why not? What other resources are still needed?

3. Does the book club program help you to better serve the needs of your students? If the program is helpful, how does it help you serve your students? If the program is not helpful in serving student, why isn't it?

4. Does the program support and/or supplement your classroom instruction? How? How could it be more supportive and supplementary?

5. Please explain specifically what information you gather about your students' literacy abilities through the book club process? In what ways is this information valuable or useful? Could the information gained through the book club process be gathered through other avenues or assessments? If so, how? If not, why not?

6. Does Orchard Hill's book club program help you to be more accountable for your students' literacy education and reading growth? If so, how? If not, why? Does the information provided by this resource help you with accountability demands that you are faced with? If so, how? If not, why?

7. Do the book club teachers serve as a resource to the classroom teachers? If so, how? If not, why?

Appendix B

Interview questions for past and present reading teachers and the ESL teacher who participates in Orchard Hill's guided reading program.

1. As a reading specialist(or ESL teacher), how do you know what needs the first and second students at Orchard Hill have? How do you best serve the needs of those students?

2. What instructional practices best serve the needs of your students?

3. How do you know what needs the first and second grade teachers at Orchard Hill have? How do you best serve the needs of the first and second grade teachers in this building?

4. How do you support and/or supplement the classroom teachers' instruction?

5. Is there growth in your students' literacy achievement? How do you know?

6. If there is growth in your students' literacy achievement, does the book club program contribute to that growth? Why or why not? If there isn't growth, why not? What other resources are still needed?

7. Does the book club program help you to better serve the needs of your students? If the program is helpful, how does it help you serve your students? If the program is not helpful in serving student, why isn't it?

8. Is there any way, other than the book club program, you could better serve the needs of students? Is the book club program a valuable use of your time?

9. Please explain specifically what information you gather about your students' literacy abilities through the book club process? In what ways is this information valuable or useful? Could the information gained through the book club process be gathered through other avenues or assessments? If so, how? If not, why not?

10. Does Orchard Hill's book club program help you to be more accountable for your students' literacy education and reading growth? If so, how? If not, why? Does the information provided by this program help you with accountability demands that you are faced with? If so, how? If not, why?

Appendix C

Requirements for submission to *The Reading Teacher*

The Reading Teacher and the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* welcome manuscript submissions for peer review. IRA's peer review standard is "double blind": authors and reviewers are not revealed to each other.
Familiarize yourself with the journals prior to submitting your article, and ensure that your work is relevant to the intended audience of the publication. Please also read these instructions carefully, since manuscripts that do not conform to them will not be reviewed.

Submission Types

Articles for either *RT* or *JAAL* should not exceed 20 double-spaced pages (approximately 6,000 words).
In addition, *The Reading Teacher* seeks submissions for its "Teaching Tips" feature. These should be no more than six double-spaced pages, and have a single focus with explicit classroom application. Brief annotated bibliographies of resources on a particular topic (no more than 500 words) may also be considered.
For *JAAL*, submissions for the "First Person" department should be no more than six to ten pages (1,500 to 2,500 words).
Permission must be obtained to use any material from another copyrighted source, whether published or unpublished. Releases must also be obtained for use of any person's work or likeness. Refer to the copyright information for more details on requirements.

Submitting Your Manuscript

Manuscripts should be submitted through IRA's Manuscript Central online submission site. Proceed as follows:
Go to the Manuscript Central submission site (http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ira).
Create your account, or log in if you already have an account. Use the drop down menu to select the IRA publication to which you wish to submit. Click the "Author Center" link.
Click the Blue star, or the "Submit a Manuscript" link found in the upper left menu bar. Then fill in the required fields and follow the instructions of how to complete the submission process. The Manuscript Central site requires that you first prepare your manuscript files (Word files, graphic files, image files, etc.), and then upload them as part of the submission process. There are instructions posted on each page of the site to help you through the process. IRA runs a double-blinded peer review

process, so you will be required to upload a Main Document, and a Blinded Copy that masks the identities of all authors.